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Breen, Laura (2014) Redefining ceramics through exhibitionary practice (1970-2009). *Journal of Art Historiography* (11). ISSN 2042-4752

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# Redefining ceramics through exhibitionary practice (1970-2009)\*

Laura Breen

When the Craftsmen Potters' Association launched its magazine *Ceramic Review* in 1970 it selected a title that accommodated forms of practice that stood outside of the studio pottery tradition as well as within it. The magazine's content was focused on hand making, perpetuating craft values, which, as Glenn Adamson has argued, were constructed in tandem with and in opposition to industry.<sup>1</sup> Philip Rawson's book *Ceramics*, published a year later, proffered a different take on the term, addressing the symbolic, tactile and associative values of ceramic objects and the symbiosis of aesthetics and function.<sup>2</sup> However, this paper explores how the designation 'ceramics' has provided a key means of accommodating art-oriented studio practice, delineating a field that has since been reconfigured in relation to changing conceptions of craft and industry as well as work in clay produced by fine artists.<sup>3</sup> As these additive and unhinging processes encompassed sculpture, ready-mades, concept-led, site-specific and relational works, the trace of the maker's hand and the skilled manipulation of clay became less certain guarantors of a work's status as ceramics. Writing on similar shifts in fine art practice during the 1960s and '70s, Benjamin Buchloh observed that institutional validation and legal position became central to admitting a work into the category of art.<sup>4</sup> Although ceramics and craft galleries and publications have largely provided that institutional context for ceramics, public museums and galleries in Britain also began to collect and exhibit

\*This paper is based upon a chapter of my forthcoming PhD thesis *Re-modelling Clay: Ceramic Practice and the Museum in Britain (1970-2013)*, which is part of the AHRC-funded project *Ceramics in the Expanded Field: Behind the Scenes at the Museum* at the University of Westminster. My research focuses on the dialogue between art-oriented ceramic practice and museum practice since 1970. It concentrates on developments in Britain, as they were embedded in a particular set of socio-economic circumstances, which shaped the evolution of ceramic education and museum practice. Whilst alert to developments in artistic practice outside the field of ceramics, for the sake of clarity, it addresses them only when they impact on that field's constitution.

1 Adamson proposed that craft 'emerged as a coherent idea, a defined terrain, only as industry's opposite number or "other."' Glenn Adamson, *The Invention of Craft*, London & New York: Bloomsbury, 2013, xiii.

2 Philip Rawson, *Ceramics*, London; New York: Oxford University Press, 1971.

3 Edward Lucie-Smith, 'The Biddable Clay', *Ceramic Review*, 44, 1977, 6;

Glenn Adamson, *Thinking through Craft*, London: Berg & V&A Museum, 2007.

4 Benjamin Buchloh, 'Conceptual Art 1962-69: From the Aesthetic of Administration to the Critique of Institutions', *October*, 55, 105-43.

contemporary ceramics on a more sustained basis in the 1970s. Faced with practices that straddled existing categorical divisions, they often employed temporary exhibitions as a means of addressing contemporary approaches to medium.<sup>5</sup> Operating at a tangent to its existing discursive formation, these exhibitions provided opportunities to re-negotiate the field's horizons in relation to both new forms of clay practice and those outside its purview. Furthermore, exhibitions had become a central means of separating art from the mass market<sup>6</sup>. As Corinne Kratz has posited 'Producing and visiting exhibitions [...] can be ways people formulate and sometimes debate notions of quality, worth, and other social values and meanings. These processes entail judgments that help create hierarchies of merit and importance and define such broad fields as aesthetics, history, and morality, as well as particular political economies.'<sup>7</sup> Largely organized by contemporary ceramicists and craft critics, such projects might, therefore, be viewed as attempts to attract new critical audiences and raise the value and status of the art-oriented ceramic practices that were their core focus.<sup>8</sup>

### Ambiguities and re-definition

The Anglo-Oriental standard outlined in Bernard Leach's *A Potter's Book* dominated British studio pottery production in the early post-war period, but by the 1960s, inspired by Lucie Rie's functionalist Modernism and Hans Coper's obsessive engagement with form, a new generation of students had begun to explore the

5 The predominant means of addressing contemporary practice in the museum since the late 1960s, temporary exhibitions allow museums to explore its rapidly changing terrain without the commitment of permanent acquisition. They also create a time-limited event that demands visitors' presence and can raise attendance levels. See James M Bradburne, 'A New Strategic Approach to the Museum and its Relationship to Society', *Museum Management and Curatorship*, 19:1, 2001, 75-84.

6 Sandy Nairne, 'Exhibitions of Contemporary Art', Emma Barker, ed., *Contemporary Cultures of Display*, New Haven: London: Yale University Press in association with Open University, 1999, 105-126.

7 Corinne A. Kratz, 'Rhetorics of Value: Constituting Worth and Meaning Through Cultural Display', *Visual Anthropology Review*, 27:1, 2011, 21.

8 The notion that the status of ceramics and the crafts might be elevated through the development of a critical framework has been a persistent concern during the period addressed in this paper. As Tanya Harrod has observed, during the 1980s *Crafts* magazine moved to incorporate more critical writing, bringing in writers from outside the crafts world such as Peter Fuller, Peter Dormer, Christopher Reid and Rosemary Hill to engage with these issues. See Tanya Harrod, 'Crafts', *Journal of Design History*. 7: 4, 1994, 299-301 [online]. Available from Jstor: <<http://www.jstor.org/stable/1316070>> [Accessed 28 January 2013]. This has also led to the growth of critical texts in discipline specific and craft magazines, conference papers and exhibition catalogues. Decades later, in 2004 Think Tank; an initiative involving nine key thinkers in the field of craft from across Europe was formed. Its stated aim 'to articulate the significance of the field in the face of rapid change', indicates the continued effort in this area. See Think Tank, *Think Tank. A European Initiative for the Applied Arts*. [online] Austria: City of Gmunden, 2006. Available from:<<http://www.thinktank04.eu>>[Accessed 14 February 2013].

aesthetic qualities of the pot.<sup>9</sup> The rejection of function by American makers such as Peter Voulkos and Robert Arneson also had a marked impact, whilst the mobilization of the material and historic associations of clay by artists such as Carl Andre and Judy Chicago would have further repercussions for the field. Pottery was largely regarded as one of the crafts: a set of medium specific disciplines which, as Tanya Harrod has elucidated, occupied an ambiguous position in the post-war period.<sup>10</sup> However, whilst many practitioners had fine art ambitions, efforts to secure the future of the crafts resulted in the foundation of the Crafts Advisory Committee (later the Crafts Council) in 1971. This move demanded a consolidated identity – one that operated in tension with the increasing heterogeneity of clay practice within the arts.

Produced at this pivotal moment, Cartwright Hall's *Modern Ceramics '71* (1971) was one of the earliest attempts to survey the impact that these developments had on ceramic practice. Planned before the Crafts Advisory Committee's inception, the exhibition had no formal affiliation to the crafts. However, the selected practitioners remained united by their commitment to medium-specificity and the use of the term ceramics in the exhibition title was, as with *Ceramic Review*, intended to indicate diversification within the field.<sup>11</sup>

In the accompanying catalogue, exhibition organizer John Thompson positioned the artists in *Modern Ceramics '71* within a lineage that included works from the USA, Germany and Japan, which he claimed had exerted a potent influence on British ceramics since the 1950s.<sup>12</sup> The involvement of Tony Hepburn – a vocal advocate of American ceramics whose articles and reviews in UK magazines such as *Ceramic Review* showed a higher level of critical engagement than most other writers in the field at the time – gave further weight to this proposal.<sup>13</sup> Indeed, *The Guardian's* northern arts correspondent, Merete Bates, used an interview with Hepburn to link the use of clay as a means of expression evidenced in the show to similar developments in the USA.<sup>14</sup>

Discussing the work in the exhibition, Thompson suggested that it had become increasingly difficult to discern between pottery and sculpture in recent years.<sup>15</sup> Despite this, the show was devoid of sculpture from outside the field and addressed the work within the framework of ceramics. This made it difficult to ascertain its merit in relation to the former category. Additionally, although *The Teacher's* description of the sculptural presentation of Hepburn's *Hanging and*

9 Bernard Leach, *A Potter's Book*, London; Boston: Faber & Faber, 1986 (Original work published 1940).

10 Tanya Harrod, *The Crafts in Britain in the Twentieth Century*, New Haven: Yale University Press, 1999.

11 Bradford City Art Gallery & Museums, *Modern Ceramics '71* [exhib. cat.], Yorkshire: Bradford City Art Gallery & Museums, 1971.

12 Bradford City Art Gallery & Museums, *Modern Ceramics '71* [exhib. cat.]

13 Hepburn exhibited work in the exhibition and also gave a talk on American Ceramics as part of the events programme: see Merete Bates. 'Breakaway Clay', *The Guardian*, 21 May 1971. Available from: Proquest [www.proquest.com](http://www.proquest.com) [accessed 5 December 2012]

14 Merete Bates, 'Breakaway Clay'.

15 Bradford City Art Gallery & Museums, *Modern Ceramics '71* [exhib. cat.]

*Performance* (1971), which required the viewer to stare through a 'building-site peephole', might be seen to support Thompson's standpoint, many of the works were small and fragile. They were, therefore, arranged in vitrines in a more traditional decorative arts approach.<sup>16</sup> In this context, Thompson's rhetoric might be regarded as an attempt to differentiate these works from those with a Leach-inspired focus on the fusion of use and beauty<sup>17</sup>. Whilst the latter risked falling into the category of what Arthur C. Danto called 'mere objects', which were 'logically exempt from interpretation', and, therefore, critical attention, Thompson sought to elevate the status of the works in the exhibition by aligning them with sculpture, without engaging with the discourse around it.<sup>18</sup>

Thompson claimed he was keen to show the diversity of the work being produced in clay at the time, selecting over 300 works that ranged from pots by Rie and Joanna Constantinidis to more idiosyncratic press-moulded objects by Paul Astbury and sculptures by Hepburn and Graham Burr. However, the exhibition privileged ceramics that diverged from the Leach standard, rather than exploring the breadth of contemporary practice. It thus reflected current debates about the place of non-functional works within the ceramic field.<sup>19</sup> The fact that the exhibition received the backing of Coper and Geoffrey Doonan - lecturers and artists who engaged with influences outside the Leach tradition - indicated that the exhibition's real achievement was to offer an alternative to the dominant mode of studio pottery practice.<sup>20</sup> It was certainly more successful in this respect than it was in showcasing diversity, with Bates describing the exhibition as 'a shifting initiative' and both she and local collector W.A. Ismay contending that its success derived from its move away from studio pottery in the Leach mould towards art-oriented ceramics.<sup>21</sup>

Although it was independent, the emphasis of *Modern Ceramics '71* was remarkably similar to that of the Crafts Advisory Committee, which was founded later that year. Lord Eccles, the government minister with responsibility for the arts, proposed that the Committee would support the 'artist craftsman.'<sup>22</sup> Leach had used this term to describe the role of the contemporary potter in *A Potter's Book* and it dissociated craft-centred practice from that of the 'designer craftsman', who was the

16 The Teacher, 'Dig this clay at Bradford', *The Teacher*, 14 May 1971.

17 'It must always be remembered that the dissociation of use and beauty is a purely arbitrary thing. It is true that pots exist which are useful and not beautiful, and other that are beautiful and impractical; but neither of these extremes can be considered normal: the normal is a balanced combination of the two.' Bernard Leach, *A Potter's Book*, 18.

18 Arthur C Danto, 'The Transfiguration of the Commonplace', *Journal of Aesthetics and Art Criticism*, 33:2, 139.

19 This subject was the focus of Craftsmen Potter's Association secretary David Canter's introduction to the first issue of *Ceramic Review*. See David Canter, 'From the Secretary's Desk', *Ceramic Review*, 1, 1970, 2.

20 Bradford City Art Gallery & Museums. *Modern Ceramics '71* [exhib. cat.].

21 Merete Bates, 'Breakaway Clay' *The Guardian*; William Alfred Ismay, 'Modern Ceramics, 1971', *Ceramic Review*, 9, 1971, 15.

22 Parliamentary Debates, House of Lords, 5th Series, vol 323, 28 July 1971, Lord Eccles announces the formation of the Crafts Advisory Committee.

figurehead of post-war initiatives to link design and industry.<sup>23</sup> However, when the Committee's secretary Victor Margrie was asked to elaborate on its meaning in a presentation at the Museums Association annual conference in 1974 and declared 'We have not attempted to define it, just to use it; to content ourselves with the wide interpretation which covers those craftsmen who, often rooted in traditional techniques, have an aim which extends beyond reproduction of past styles and methods.'<sup>24</sup> The Committee's remit was, therefore, defined in the negative, against the emulative approach epitomized by the Leach tradition, rather than by measurable criteria. This ambiguity led to a curious situation where the Crafts Advisory Committee supported exhibitions that included craft media yet attempted to move beyond 'the crafts', such as Sunderland Arts Centre's *State of Clay* (1978).

The title *State of Clay* represented a deliberate attempt to move away from the terms pottery and ceramics towards an understanding of clay that showed its wider application.<sup>25</sup> Although the show focused on practitioners with ceramics training, all of the exhibits were explicitly non-utilitarian. Astbury's use of press-moulded porcelain forms, and Glenys Barton's bone china works, which were produced in collaboration with Wedgwood, challenged the ideological opposition to industrial process adopted by many studio ceramicists: a stance that Adamson suggested was central to the 'invention of craft.'<sup>26</sup> Others such as Gillian Lowndes and Percy Peacock used experimental mixed media techniques. Lowndes was an acknowledged influence on Peacock, having taught on his degree course at Bristol, yet his attitude was equally aligned with critical discussion outside the field.<sup>27</sup> For example, his artist's statement, which listed adjectives for describing clay and his actions upon it, recalled Richard Serra's *Verb List Compilation* (1967-68). Furthermore, in his assertion that 'Clay is simply the most versatile material I have found for realizing my ideas'; he prioritised the use clay as a means of expression over that of ceramics as a disciplinary frame.<sup>28</sup> Peacock's work also demanded new approaches to display: modular, floor-based pieces, such as *Impact Imperative* (1978) did not have a permanent formation, nor could they be protected by glass casing usually reserved for fragile works. These issues made installation difficult for the curators and although Peacock provided details about the scale and format of the work in advance, he was asked to install it himself on several occasions.<sup>29</sup>

In her catalogue introduction the Crafts Advisory Committee's Marigold Colman stated that the exhibition aimed to create parity between clay sculpture and

23 Bernard Leach, *A Potter's Book*, 1. See also Tanya Harrod, *Factfile on the History of the Crafts Council*. Great Britain: The Crafts Council, 1994, 7.

24 Victor Margrie, 'The work of the Crafts Advisory Committee', *Museums Journal*, 74: 3, 1974, 117-118.

25 David Vaughan, interview by Laura Breen, 12 June 2013.

26 Adamson, *The Invention of Craft*, xiii.

27 Percy Peacock, interview by Laura Breen, 19 April 2013.

28 Percy Peacock, 'Artist Statement', *State of Clay: A Sunderland Arts Centre Touring Exhibition* [exhib. cat.], Sunderland: Sunderland Arts Centre, 1978, 39.

29 Percy Peacock, interview by Laura Breen, 19 April 2013.

the Leach tradition.<sup>30</sup> Much like the Crafts Advisory Committee's 'artist craftsman', the term 'clay sculpture' was simply proffered as an alternative to the status quo. In this context, the inclusion of a single terracotta maquette by RCA ceramics tutor Eduardo Paolozzi might be viewed as a token attempt to validate the other work as sculpture without forcing the work into direct critical comparison with its contemporaries in that field. However, the same work gains a new resonance when read alongside co-curators David Vaughan and Tony Knipe's catalogue foreword, which discusses experimental approaches to medium and the potential to transcend disciplinary boundaries.<sup>31</sup> Whilst the exhibition did not represent the state of clay in all its applications, it did include work that challenged existing conceptions of ceramic practice: Peacock's work highlighted the reductive nature of medium-based comparisons and, along with Astbury's and Lowndes's work in particular, foregrounded experimental approaches to media within the ceramic field. The mixed messages conveyed by the *State of Clay* exhibition, its curators and official backers thus exemplified the tension between The Crafts Advisory Committee's support of innovative practice and its need to maintain the distinction of the crafts as a set of medium-based disciplines in order to gain funding.

### New standards

Some of the work in *State of Clay*, if not the accompanying rhetoric, indicated that ceramicists were embracing the post-modern collapse of disciplinary boundaries. However, by the 1980s the Crafts Council held increasing sway over the type of ceramic work that was promoted and exhibited in Britain's public galleries. They focused their lens on the work and theories of a group of young, critically-engaged, ceramicists who had graduated from the RCA during the 1970s, which included Alison Britton, Jacqueline Poncelet, Barton and Elizabeth Fritsch. Whilst the Crafts Council continued to support the work of a range of practitioners, discussions about ceramics during this period were dominated by this group's concerns, particularly their interrogation of function and containment as subjects and the vessel's ornamental role. As Harrod has described, earlier examples of expression through craft media were obscured, as if the model of the artist-craftsman, which the Council promoted, was an entirely new phenomenon.<sup>32</sup>

Peter Dormer's *Fast Forward: New Directions in British Ceramics* (1985) brought the perceived dichotomy between Crafts Council-sponsored innovation and Leach inspired traditionalists together with explosive effects. Intensely didactic, the exhibition was laid out to provide a lineage for contemporary work that stood outside the Leach tradition. It was divided into two main sections: historical and

30 Marigold Colman, 'Introduction', *State of Clay: A Sunderland Arts Centre Touring Exhibition*, 5-6.

31 Tony Knipe and David Vaughan, 'Foreword', *State of Clay: A Sunderland Arts Centre Touring Exhibition*, 3. For further discussion of how meaning is produced through exhibitions in relation to associated texts see Eilean Hooper-Greenhill, *Museums and their Visitors*, London: Routledge, 1994, 115-139.

32 Tanya Harrod, *The Crafts in Britain in the Twentieth Century*, 370.

modern, with Dormer suggesting that the historical section should be 'v. critical', showing 'how the modern generation had benefitted from and why they have reacted against their recent heritage.'<sup>33</sup> Positioning himself as the arbiter of taste, Dormer then set out to demonstrate this argument through the exhibition's narrative.

The historical section of the exhibition was structured around Clement Greenberg's notion that kitsch was something that watered down tradition by adopting its effects without regard for its ideological origins.<sup>34</sup> Dormer illustrated his thesis with objects, using Korean, Japanese and Chinese pots as the unmediated tradition at the pinnacle. He proposed that the work followed a downward trajectory from this point, beginning with Leach, who, he claimed, mistranslated the Japanese tradition and catalyzed the descent into kitsch. His narrative culminated in a phenomenon that he christened 'the ploughman's pot': a label intended to draw an analogy between the Anglo-Oriental pot and the Milk Marketing Board's invention of the ploughman's lunch.<sup>35</sup> This was exemplified by the work of Bernard's son, David Leach.

Dormer's narrative also drew upon the theories of Eric Hobsbawm, who proposed that some traditions were invented in order to create a sense of continuity with the past.<sup>36</sup> Their naturalisation could, he argued, derail the evolution of cultural practices and perpetuate models that are detached from contemporary life. This idea resonated with Dormer, who felt that the dominance of Leach's Anglo-Oriental orthodoxy had led to an elision of the fact that the primary function of pottery in contemporary life was decorative. By exposing the flaw in the standard that Leach laid out in *A Potter's Book*, he cleared a space in which to construct an alternative history, based on decorative traditions. He used the work of two potters to mark the transition between the historical and modern sections of the exhibition: in his notebook he explained 'Very often kitsch has undermined ceramics. However [Michael] Cardew (English trad.) Coper (European) saved the day.'<sup>37</sup>

Dormer's claim that there was a 'ceramics' to be undermined highlights the hermeticism of his outlook. By adopting a linear trajectory he was able to identify Cardew and Coper as the inheritors of those traditions, and the starting point for more recent work, without addressing extra-disciplinary influences. He extended this approach in the modern section of the exhibition, where he juxtaposed contemporary pots with historic objects in order to highlight stylistic affinities. His display strategies included making visual analogies between Janice Tchalenko's work and a 16<sup>th</sup> century Palissy dish and the work of Cardew, Glen Lukens and

33 Peter Dormer, 'Notebook re: ceramics exhibition ICA Spring '85. Preliminary ideas. Attn: Declan McGonagle', ICA collection [manuscript] 955/7/7/29, London: Tate Archive, 1985.

34 Clement Greenberg, 'Avant-garde and kitsch', *Partisan Review*, 6: 5, 1939, 34-39.

35 Richard Eyre's film, *The Ploughman's Lunch*, which was based on a screenplay by Ian McEwan, brought the Milk Marketing Board's promotion of the ploughman's lunch – and debate about its authenticity – to public attention in 1983.

36 Eric Hobsbawm and Terence Ranger, eds, *The Invention of Tradition*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1983.

37 Peter Dormer, 'Notebook re: ceramics exhibition ICA Spring '85. Preliminary ideas. Attn: Declan McGonagle.'



Richard Slee. By doing so he positioned the new work as the logical next step in the evolution of particular decorative traditions. The inclusion of pieces from Tchalenko's collaboration with Dartington Pottery suggested that Dormer was also keen to explode the opposition of hand-made and industrial, which was at the core of the ideology that surrounded the crafts. Instead, he emphasized the works' shared status as pottery.

Dormer decided to work with the ICA in an attempt to market ceramics to a different audience. Nevertheless, he maintained that the modern pot was a minor art for domestic consumption, which was located between utility and ornament.<sup>38</sup> This created a conflict between the message communicated by the traditional white cube exhibition space, which 'subtracts all cues that interfere with the fact that [an object] is "art"' and Dormer's thesis that the home was the true place for pottery.<sup>39</sup> He was alert to the fact that the small scale of many ceramic forms could leave them stranded in white cube spaces and attempted to counteract this by displaying blown up images of details from the smaller works above them. Poncelet's work, in particular, though, highlighted the destabilizing power of context. Dormer stressed that it would be an applied art, rather than sculpture show and Paul Filmer's catalogue essay foregrounded the links between her technique and pottery. However, the work itself demanded open, plinth-based presentation, which emphasized its sculptural presence.<sup>40</sup>

The exhibition closed with works by Rie, Coper, and Bill Newland, which Dormer felt resisted 'the craft fayre content of the post-war pottery revival,' arranged on a series of plinths of different heights.<sup>41</sup> By placing Newland, whose work engaged with design, architecture, figuration and decoration, on a pedestal alongside the celebrated pairing of Rie and Coper, Dormer afforded him a status on a par with these acknowledged greats.<sup>42</sup> Situating the trio's work at the close of the show, he also positioned them as the polar opposite of the kitsch that opened it: an alternative standard, the precepts of which were crystallized in his book *The New Ceramics: Trends and Traditions*, which was published the following year.<sup>43</sup>

Whilst the free use of materials and the appropriation of forms by fine artists had rendered many of Greenberg's arguments about medium specificity and autonomy obsolete by the time of the exhibition, Dormer continued to use them as a

38 Peter Dormer, 'Notebook re: ceramics exhibition ICA Spring '85. Preliminary ideas. Attn: Declan McGonagle.'

39 Brian O' Doherty, *Inside the White Cube: The Ideology of the Gallery Space*, California: University of California Press, 1976, 14.

40 Paul Filmer, 'Jacqui Poncelet', *Fast Forward* [exhib. cat.] London: Institute of Contemporary Arts, 1985, 28-32; Peter Dormer, 'Notebook re: ceramics exhibition ICA Spring '85. Preliminary ideas. Attn: Declan McGonagle.'

41 Peter Dormer, 'Notebook re: ceramics exhibition ICA Spring '85. Preliminary ideas. Attn: Declan McGonagle.'

42 Harrod's article *The Forgotten '50s*, which has been credited with raising the profile of the group of artists known as the 'Picassoettes' to which Newland belonged, was not published until 1989. Tanya Harrod, 'The forgotten '50s', *Crafts*. 98:3, 1989, 30-33.

43 Peter Dormer, *The New Ceramics: Trends and Traditions*, London: Thames and Hudson, 1986.

reference point. In a draft for a text panel headed 'Familiar Forms' he wrote 'Pottery can offer delight or solace. But it is neither questioning. Nor subversive of the status quo.'<sup>44</sup> This argument turned Greenberg's claim that avant-garde art must challenge cultural norms on its head: whereas the lack of a critical edge had been seen to exclude and marginalize pottery from fine art discourse, Dormer embraced that separation and used it to argue for distinction. The futility of this position was highlighted two years later when Antony Stokes, the organizer of the *Vessel* exhibition at the Serpentine Gallery, set out to challenge 'the spurious distinctions between the fine arts and the crafts.'<sup>45</sup> Viewed with this in mind, *Fast Forward* might be perceived as an attempt to argue for ceramics' place as a defined, modernist discipline at a time when traditional boundaries were being eroded: a situation Dormer later admitted he found problematic.<sup>46</sup>

The use of ceramic forms and materials by artists from outside the field had a more direct impact on *The Raw and the Cooked: New Work in Clay in Britain* (1993). Prominent potter Alison Britton and critic and former *Crafts* magazine editor Martina Margetts curated the exhibition, which brought works by trained ceramicists together with the clay works of established sculptors, at the invitation of Modern Art Oxford's Director; David Elliott. Produced eight years after *Fast Forward*, it focused on the artistic potential of the material.

The initial premise of the venture, provisionally titled: *The Undomesticated Product: New Perimeters in British Ceramic Art* was to demonstrate that 'Those ceramics, intimate yet referential, which transcend the requirements of utility to deal with views of the world, rather than those of the home, and which unite the concerns of paintings and sculpture in volumetric, decorated forms, can be viewed as a branch of art.'<sup>47</sup> This title and the description explicitly declared the preconceptions of ceramics that the curators hoped to challenge: the domestic and utilitarian. These were the aspects of ceramic practice that Dormer had privileged in *Fast Forward*. The proposal that the ceramics they would show dealt with views of the world, not the domestic domain may be seen to betray a concern with countering ceramics' exclusion from modernism. However, in her famous text from *The Maker's Eye*, Britton expressed the desire that work such as her own, which was concerned with the 'outer limits of function,' be viewed as a phenomenon that was akin to, rather than part of, modernism.<sup>48</sup> Asserting that this area of ceramic practice can be viewed as a *branch* of art, the proposal retains a similar concern with separation. From this perspective, the exhibition might be regarded as a challenge

44 Peter Dormer, 'Notebook re: ceramics exhibition ICA Spring '85. Preliminary ideas. Attn: Declan McGonagle.'

45 Andrew Graham-Dixon, 'The Blackboard Jungle', *The Independent*, 29 September 1987. [online] < <http://www.andrewgrahamdixon.com/archive/readArticle/1105> > Accessed: 5 June 2013.

46 Peter Dormer, *The New Ceramics: Trends and Traditions*, London: Thames and Hudson, 1994 (revised).

47 Alison Britton and Martina Margetts, 'Draft exhibition proposal', *The Raw and the Cooked collection*. Oxford: Modern Art Oxford archive, about 1991.

48 Alison Britton, 'Alison Britton (artist's statement)', *The Maker's Eye* [exhibition cat.], London: Crafts Council. 1981, 16.

on the epistemological basis of the overarching category of ceramics, which was aligned with similar projects in photography in the 1970s.<sup>49</sup>

Whilst the exhibition's initial sobriquet favoured works such as Britton's, which emanated from the ceramic community and centred on the vessel as concept, the final title, which used the word clay, could encompass a broader spectrum of work. In practice, however, the selection was weighted towards those with ceramics training. Antony Gormley, Tony Cragg, Bruce McLean and – to a degree – Grayson Perry and Poncelet, were the only artists who operated outside the field, although Brian Iles and Stephanie Bergman were also known for their work in other craft media. Furthermore, there was a conspicuous absence of design, despite Margetts discussing its importance in her catalogue essay.<sup>50</sup> To some extent the scope of the exhibition was better defined by its exclusions, which Margetts described as anybody 'whose purpose was to make work in clay that was for use, only, primarily for use in a utilitarian way.'<sup>51</sup> Critic Edward Lucie-Smith viewed the exhibition as a rebellion against the patriarchal figure of Bernard Leach, which maintained many of his values, in particular the rejection of mass-production.<sup>52</sup> This accusation is borne out by the catalogue essays and archival papers. Indeed, although she discussed how cultural relativism opened the door to new understandings of clay, Margetts's proposal that 'Here clay is not a craft material, but an authentic medium for sculpture,' highlighted her concern with challenging the dominant model of ceramic practice.<sup>53</sup> Her dichotomous stance might, therefore, be regarded as an attempt to counter 'the critical and institutional biases,' which she felt had inhibited the development of non-vessel based ceramic practice in Britain.<sup>54</sup>

The works in *The Raw and the Cooked* were selected for highly personal reasons and then split into five equally subjective categories: Transitional Objects; Abstraction; Landscape; Landscape of the Mind and Appearances. This approach avoided the pitfalls of choosing works to illustrate themes, rather than on their own merit, but by exposing the arbitrariness of categorization it also undermined the show's overall coherence. In a revised synopsis of the exhibition's aims Margetts acknowledged this, underscoring the fluidity of the categories employed and the potential for cross-referencing between works.<sup>55</sup> In contrast, Britton's description of it as 'a synthesis, as a resolved combination of disparate ingredients, like a meal'

49 Douglas Crimp, 'Photographs at the End of Modernism', *On the Museum's Ruins*, 2-42.

50 Martina Margetts, 'Metamorphosis: The Culture of Ceramics', *The Raw and the Cooked* [exhibition cat.] 1993.

51 Martina Margetts, 'Transcript of talk for The Raw and the cooked symposium: Oxford Brookes University', *The Raw and the Cooked collection*, Oxford: Modern Art Oxford archive, 1994.

52 Edward Lucie-Smith, 'The Raw and the Cooked' *Ceramic Review*, 143, 1993, 21.

53 Martina Margetts, 'Metamorphosis: the culture of ceramics', 15.

54 Martina Margetts, 'Metamorphosis: the culture of ceramics', 14.

55 Martina Margetts, 'Revised synopsis', *The Raw and the Cooked collection*, Oxford: Modern Art Oxford archive, 1993.

suggests an integration that was lacking: medium and the exhibition format were often the only things that united the works on display.<sup>56</sup>

John Pawson's exhibition design, which centred on white plinths, was designed to create minimum interference with the work.<sup>57</sup> Whilst Brian O' Doherty, in particular, had critiqued the supposed neutrality of this approach and the myth of the autonomous artwork, which it perpetuated, it still connoted fine art.<sup>58</sup> The layout was intended to form a direct contrast with the massed ranks of ceramic vessels found in connoisseurial museum displays and to, instead, highlight the works' status as sculpture.<sup>59</sup> It was also used to situate the works in 'as undomestic a setting as possible' and encourage visitors to question the place of ceramics.<sup>60</sup> Elliott had hoped that focusing on the works themselves would challenge conventional modes of categorization, yet, far from providing a neutral backdrop, the use of aestheticizing white-cube techniques manifested itself as an attempt to shift them from the craft discourse to another frame: that of sculpture.

The Barbican issued a press release that described *The Raw and the Cooked* as 'the first major exhibition to address the issue of how British artists working in clay have broken with the accepted notions and expectations of their place within the arts.'<sup>61</sup> To some extent, though, by including work by prominent sculptors such as Gormley and Cragg, the exhibition challenged the idea that there *was* an expected place for artists who worked with clay at that point. These were not works that received marginal billing on their curriculum vitae, but constituent parts of their oeuvres alongside works in other media. Margetts alluded to this expansion when she addressed process and the experiential in her catalogue essay, although she maintained the distinction 'ceramic art.' In contrast, Britton's claims that ceramic objects were universally understandable and that technical knowledge united the works in the exhibition reveal more insular concerns.<sup>62</sup> However, just as the white cube display operated in tension with the pluralism evidenced in the works' selection and arrangement, Britton contradicted her argument by acknowledging the impossibility of assigning works to a single category. In doing so she showed the

56 Alison Britton, 'Use, beauty, ugliness and irony' *The Raw and the Cooked* [exhibition cat.], 1993, 10.

57 Pawson is now famed for his minimalist approach to light and space. Margetts had admired the stark simplicity of his design for an exhibition of tools at the V&A and wanted a similar look. See Alison Britton, 'Transcript of talk for The Raw and the Cooked symposium: Oxford Brookes University', *The Raw and the Cooked collection*, Oxford: Modern Art Oxford archive, 1994.

58 Brian O' Doherty, *Inside the White Cube: The Ideology of the Gallery Space*.

59 David Elliott, 'Letter to John Pawson', [correspondence], *The Raw and the Cooked collection*, Oxford: Modern Art Oxford archive, 10 January 1993.

60 David Elliott, 'Letter to John Pawson', [correspondence], *The Raw and the Cooked collection*, Oxford: Modern Art Oxford archive, 10 January 1993.

61 Barbican, 'Press Release', *The Raw and the Cooked collection*, Oxford: Modern Art Oxford archive, 1993.

62 Martina Margetts, 'Metamorphosis: the culture of ceramics', 13-15.  
Alison Britton, 'Use, beauty, ugliness and irony', 10.

true merit of the exhibition: its failed unity highlighted the broad potential of clay as a medium.

## After Modernism

Over the past fifteen years the concept of the expanded field has gained currency in the discourse around ceramics.<sup>63</sup> Taken from Rosalind Krauss's seminal essay *Sculpture in the Expanded Field*, the term was originally coined in response to the emergence of art practices that defied conventional classifications during the 1960s and '70s.<sup>64</sup> However, it was only in the 1990s that the rise of concept and context-oriented practices began to uproot one facet of ceramic practice – the art-oriented strand – from its basis in object making. Whilst *The Raw and the Cooked* included several works in this vein, in 2004 Tate Liverpool mounted an exhibition – *A Secret History of Clay: From Gauguin to Gormley* – that has since come to symbolize this shift.<sup>65</sup>

Co-curated by Tate Liverpool's head of exhibitions Simon Groom and potter and writer Edmund De Waal, the exhibition was an ambitious, if more tightly defined take on medium. Like De Waal's book *20<sup>th</sup> Century Ceramics*, which provided its starting point, the exhibition had a chronological layout and explored how artists within established art historical movements had used clay.<sup>66</sup> However, whilst De Waal's book also included industrial and studio pottery, most of the precedents in the exhibition – including the artists named in the title – were drawn from the world of fine art.

Groom took the vessel as a key motif in the exhibition, partly, he admitted, because he was frustrated with the hermetic craft discourse that surrounded it.<sup>67</sup> He intended to challenge this insular approach by creating a narrative that exploded outwards from Gauguin's traditional vessel forms, through increasingly larger and more ambiguous works such as those of Cragg and Richard Deacon, before returning the visitor to the domestic-scaled vessel with a renewed perspective.<sup>68</sup> This transition was emphasized by the placement of Clare Twomey's installation *Consciousness/Conscience* (2004) in the doorway to the final section. The work was comprised of 96 ceramic tiles made by Royal Crown Derby to the artist's specification, which the visitor was compelled to step on in order to reach the final section of the exhibition. Crushing them in the process, they engaged with the materiality of clay and broke the taboo of smashing ceramics within a gallery.

63 Garth Clark, ed., *Ceramic Millennium. Critical Writings on Ceramic History, Theory and Art*, Halifax, Nova Scotia: Press of the Nova Scotia College of Art and Design, 2006; Cigalle Hanaor, ed., *Breaking the Mould: New Approaches to Ceramics*, London: Black Dog Publishing, 2007; Emmanuel Cooper, *Contemporary Ceramics*, London: Thames & Hudson, 2009.

64 Rosalind Krauss, 'Sculpture in the Expanded Field', *October*, 8, 1979, 30-44.

65 Peter Lewis, 'Fired up: ceramics and meaning', *Fired up: Ceramics and Meaning*, Oldham: Gallery Oldham, 2010, 5-7.

66 Edmund De Waal, *20th Century Ceramics*, London; New York: Thames & Hudson, 2003.

67 Simon Groom, interview by Laura Breen, 12 March 2013.

68 Simon Groom, 'Terra incognita', *A Secret History of Clay from Gauguin to Gormley*, 15-18.

Twomey's work led to a room set filled with ceramic objects, which ranged from Slee's brooms, balanced against the wall, to Frances Upritchard's re-purposed stoneware jars, which were displayed in a glass-fronted cabinet. Groom wanted this section to look as domestic and far from a museum environment as possible: an approach that contrasted with that of *The Raw and the Cooked*, where domestic associations were explicitly avoided.<sup>69</sup> It is notable, however, that although James Turrell's *Lapsed Quaker Ware* (1998) and Cindy Sherman's *Madame du Pompadour* tea service (1989-1991) were housed in a glass-fronted case, Andrew Lord asked for his *Profile Vase (Duchamp) 'The Recovery of Meaning'* (2002) to be separated out.<sup>70</sup> This move by Lord – a trained ceramicist who had successfully used sculptural display and the art gallery context as means of communicating the non-functionality of his vessel-based works – highlighted their susceptibility to curatorial re-authoring.<sup>71</sup> Torn from the frame he had inserted it into and attached a biography that reinforced his ceramic training, his vase might be read according to the laws of that field – as a vase. His fierce reaction suggested that the hierarchical distinction between the home as subject of and destination for artistic practice continued to impact on his practice.<sup>72</sup>

Tate Director Christoph Grunenberg described *A Secret History of Clay* as 'The first exhibition to present artists who have worked in clay from the beginning of the twentieth century to the present day.'<sup>73</sup> However, it largely centred on works by artists who had established places in the canonical histories of art. Contemporary practitioners with a ceramics-specific focus were only admitted to the category of 'artists who have worked in clay' to a noticeable degree in the final section. Here, their work was seen to overlap with dominant artworld approaches, rather than vice-versa. Furthermore, whilst staging this exhibition at the Tate – an archetypal modern art gallery – might be seen to signal institutional acknowledgement, it was relegated to a regional outpost and stood apart from permanent collections displays, leaving the galleries' core narratives intact.<sup>74</sup>

69 Simon Groom, 'Email to Mark Lomas at Doncaster Museum', *Tate archive*, 6 May 2004.

70 Simon Groom, interview by Laura Breen.

71 When Groom and De Waal, replaced the heavy wire armature of his *Profile Vase (Duchamp) 'The recovery of meaning'* (2002) and placed it on a roped-off side table they hoped to create a dialogue with the domestic history of ceramics. For Lord it was a curatorial attempt to return his work to a decorative origin that it never had and, therefore, obliterated the work. See Edmund De Waal and Simon Groom (eds.) *A Secret History of Clay from Gauguin to Gormley*. Liverpool: Tate Publishing (2004): 36; Simon Groom, interview by Laura Breen; Dawn Ades, *Andrew Lord*, Milton Keynes: Milton Keynes Gallery, 2010, 19.

72 See Colin Painter, 'Introduction', Colin Painter, ed. *Contemporary Art and the Home*, Oxford and New York: Berg, 2002, 1-6.

73 Christoph Grunenberg, 'Introduction', *A Secret History of Clay from Gauguin to Gormley*, Liverpool: Tate Publishing, 2004, 9.

74 The reflexive values promoted by Tate Liverpool, which was founded amidst the social and political unrest of the 1980s, operated in opposition to the traditional values that legitimized Tate Britain. See Andrew Dewdney, David Dibosa and Victoria Walsh, eds. *Post-Critical Museology. Theory and Practice in the Art Museum*, Oxon and New York: Routledge, 2013.

Although De Waal asserted that the exhibition offered just one possible history of clay, it constructed a heritage for art-oriented contemporary practice, which collapsed the status-limiting distinction between medium-led and concept-led practices.<sup>75</sup> Krauss observed the emergence of comparable root-seeking strategies, which she regarded as attempts to re-establish boundaries, in response to the expansion of sculptural practice<sup>76</sup>. From the perspective of the ceramic field, the exhibition also, therefore, conformed to Griselda Pollock's description of canon building, forging a 'retrospectively legitimating backbone of a cultural and political identity, a consolidated narrative of origin, conferring authority on the texts selected to naturalize this function.'<sup>77</sup> Situated towards the exit, De Waal's *Porcelain Wall* appeared as the latest manifestation - or even the apotheosis - of this particular history of ceramics.<sup>78</sup>

Composed of multiple ceramic cylinders, which he had hand-thrown, the values embodied in De Waal's work formed an illuminating contrast with the expanded model of authorship evidenced in Gormley's *Field* (1991), which was sited on the second floor. For Gormley each figure – made by a different individual – was a component of an artwork that he had choreographed, whereas De Waal was attempting to navigate the territory between the hand-making of objects and authorship of an artwork. A mocked-up design for the private view invitation, which incorporated fingerprints, was vetoed on the grounds that it had craft associations, rather than art. However, the text panel that accompanied Gormley's *Field* (1991) stressed that each of the 35,000 figures were handcrafted.<sup>79</sup> These dissonant examples further underscored the contingency of meaning: De Waal employed an in-built framing device to ensure his work was read sculpturally, privileging the overall concept, whilst the evidence of outsourced hand-making served conceptual ends in Gormley's work. In his catalogue essay, Groom pronounced that shifts in context and display had rendered traditional distinctions between art and craft irrelevant.<sup>80</sup> Drawing on Pollock, it might, instead, be argued that we are 'after' rather than 'post' modernism and that the historic distinctions between art and craft continue to shape the discourse around ceramics.<sup>81</sup>

In a retrospective interview about the exhibition, Groom admitted: 'the more you look, the more artists do work in clay, and so it becomes a bit ridiculous. It's a

75 Edmund De Waal, 'High unseriousness: artists and clay', *A Secret History of Clay from Gauguin to Gormley*, 38-54.

76 Rosalind Krauss, 'Sculpture in the Expanded Field', *October*, 32. 'No sooner had minimal sculpture appeared on the horizon of the aesthetic experience of the 1960s, than criticism began to construct a paternity for this work, a set of constructivist fathers who could legitimize and thereby authenticate the strangeness of these objects.'

77 Griselda Pollock, 'About canons and culture wars', *Differencing the Canon: Feminism and the Writing of Art's Histories*, London: Routledge, 1999, 3.

78 Although De Waal's book does not feature his own work, Groom felt it was essential to include it in the exhibition. Simon Groom, interview by Laura Breen.

79 Tate archive, handwritten note, *Tate archive*, undated.

80 Simon Groom, 'Terra incognita', *A Secret History of Clay from Gauguin to Gormley*, 15-18.

81 Griselda Pollock, 'Un-framing the modern: critical space/public possibility', *Museums after Modernism: Strategies of Engagement*, Malden, MA: Blackwell, 2007, 1-39.

bit like putting on a show of painting or something.’<sup>82</sup> His words echoed those of Barbara Zucker, co-founder of the USA’s first all-female co-operative gallery (AIR). As she posited, although it was obvious with hindsight, it was necessary to declare this work’s presence in order to show that it existed.<sup>83</sup> However, whilst De Waal claimed that the collaboration between fine artists and ceramicists had been excluded from history, this accusation might equally be levelled at the institutions and publications that have forged the histories of ceramics.<sup>84</sup> In a preview of the exhibition for *Crafts* magazine, Harrod suggested that the exhibition might be a wake-up call for studio ceramicists, as it showed clay work by successful artists whose practice was not ceramic-centric.<sup>85</sup> The subsequent prominence of the exhibition in the critical discourse around ceramics, when compared with its minimal impact on the canonical histories of art, indicates that this was its real achievement<sup>86</sup>.

*A Secret History of Clay* was produced on the cusp of change: the Crafts Council had repositioned itself with regard to both artistic media and exhibitions at the dawn of the twenty-first century. Their own exhibition space was closed in 2006 and they began to work more closely with established museums, including the V&A, to facilitate shows such as *Out of the Ordinary: Spectacular Craft* (2007) and *The Power of Making* (2011). These exhibitions illustrated how craft processes could be employed to a host of ends, which moved beyond traditional craft media and forms. They were part of broader critical efforts to reframe craft as a verb, which pivoted on the idea that ‘Craft only exists in motion. It is a way of doing things, not a classification of objects, institutions or people.’<sup>87</sup> Born amidst this climate, *Possibilities and Losses: Transitions in Clay* – an exhibition staged by Middleborough Institute of Modern Art in association with The Crafts Council in 2009 – reflected the contemporary intellectual current and the Craft Council’s new role.

*Possibilities and Losses* developed from ceramicist Clare Twomey’s proposal for a show that would dovetail with her academic research into artists that worked

82 Simon Groom, interview by Laura Breen, 12 March 2013.

83 Sandy Nairne, ‘The institutionalization of dissent’, Bruce W. Ferguson, Reesa Greenberg and Sandy Nairne, eds. *Thinking about Exhibitions*, London; New York: Routledge, 1996, 387-410.

84 Edmund De Waal, ‘In conversation with Laura Britton: Rethinking clay symposium, Tate Liverpool, June 5 2004’, *Ceramic Review*, 209, 2004, 61. ‘Ironically, it is the postwar history of ceramics itself, as much as the absence of a sympathetic cultural context, which has delayed the present coming of age of British ceramic art.’ This is something Margetts also suggested in the *Raw and the Cooked* catalogue. Martina Margetts, ‘Metamorphosis: the culture of ceramics’ *The Raw and the Cooked* [exhibition cat.] 1993, 13.

85 Tanya Harrod, ‘Hidden depths: A Secret History of Clay’, *Crafts* 189, 2004, 29-32.

86 See, for example, Andrew Livingstone, *Authenticity of Clay and its Re-definition Within Contemporary Practice: Ceramic Familiarity and the Contribution to Expansion*, unpublished PhD thesis, Northern Ireland: University of Ulster, 2008; Wendy Patricia Tuxill, *A Re-Conceptualisation of Contemporary Sculptural Ceramics from a Post-Minimal Perspective*, unpublished PhD thesis, Hertfordshire: University of Hertfordshire, 2010; Laura Gray, ‘On the Transgressive Nature of Ceramics’, *Ceramics: Art and Perception*, 89, 2012, 100-103.

87 Glenn Adamson, *Thinking Through Craft*, 4.



with installation, clay and craft. Twomey and senior curator James Beighton produced the exhibition together, with Beighton selecting Twomey's *Monument* (2009) as a starting point. The work, which Twomey was producing for the Zuiderzee Museum in Holland at the time, was comprised of a pile of ceramic waste from the Johnson Tiles Factory in Stoke-on-Trent. En masse, the fragmentary, broken and rejected objects attained a colossal presence. The work resounded with questions about human mortality and commemoration as well as referencing the decline of the British ceramics industry. However, rather than providing a fixed and insurmountable inheritance, Twomey's take on the past was a temporary agglomeration. A testament to past loss that threatened collapse rather than offering the illusion of permanence, it became material for the present: something highlighted in the titular emphasis on *transition*. Furthermore, taking ceramics as material and subject, and deferring the production of the clay objects to unseen craftspeople in industry, it also raised questions about Twomey's identity as a ceramicist.

Beighton and Twomey were keenly aware that the exhibition had the potential to perpetuate existing medium-based divisions and did not want to produce a survey show. Rather than trying to balance the need for structural organization with the diversity of practices, they reduced its scope to 'four artists, four rooms, four possibilities.'<sup>88</sup> Proceeding from *Monument*, they turned to a pre-existing list of artists who they would like to work with, selecting works that were united more by conceptual affinity than discipline-specific criteria. However, as the impetus for the exhibition came from Twomey's ceramics-centred research and the other works, necessarily involved clay. It might, therefore, be argued that the academic funding system at that time, which demanded distinction, curtailed the opportunities for intradisciplinary dialogue provided by the work itself.

Fragmentary or process-based, the works in the exhibition confronted the idea of the discrete and innocuous decorative art object. One of the electrical circuits in Keith Harrison's *Brother* (2009) failed during a live firing with a full school group in situ, necessitating an evacuation of the building. Twomey's *Monument* (2009), an 8-metre tall pitcher pile of broken ceramic seconds from factories around Stoke-on-Trent, also required constant invigilation. Similarly, Neil Brownsword's *Salvage Series* (2005) focused on industrial detritus: detached from context, the fragments of industrial waste became beautiful artefacts. However, for the final artist Linda Sormin, the confrontation with museum norms was more explicit: curator Beighton was invited to crawl through the paths made available to him on opening night and attack the work with a hammer. Responding to the work, Adamson asked 'Once a museum has staged a ceramic exhibition where most of the clay is either unfired or broken, and which features a curator smashing a sculpture into bits, how in all decency can it go back to placing lovely vessels on plinths?'<sup>89</sup> He also proposed that the four artists in the exhibition had taken on the role of 'self-conscious outsiders,' arguing that this gave them a fresh perspective on medium and describing

<sup>88</sup> James Beighton, interview by Laura Breen, 15 April 2013.

<sup>89</sup> Glenn Adamson, 'Outsider artists', *Possibilities and Losses: Transitions in Clay*. Middlesbrough: Middlesbrough Institute of Modern Art, 2009, unpag.

Brownsword as 'The Historian', Sormin as 'The Immigrant', Harrison as 'The Alien' and Twomey as 'The Curator'.<sup>90</sup> Nevertheless, as artists with ceramic training whose works are mainly discussed within the ceramic field, these roles were only assumed. Equally, the answer to his question about Sormin's work depended on the works being read in relationship to existing perceptions of ceramics, as these norms had already been challenged in other areas of art practice.

Hal Foster argued that artists are often asked to adopt the position of the ethnographer and accorded the right to speak on behalf of a marginalized constituency, to which they are seen to belong.<sup>91</sup> This approach pivots on the idea that those who are culturally or socially 'other' have access to a higher level of access to alterity and, therefore, transformative power. Adamson's description of the artists, as 'other' to the dominant field of ceramics might be seen to fall into this trap. As a model, it reinstitutes the dialectic of inside/outside and allows the institution at the centre – in this case that of ceramics – to appear self-reflexive whilst leaving its core premise untouched. However, it also reflects the persistence of the category of ceramics and its relationship to academic organization, funding and the market. In this context, Miwon Kwon's argument that

'the distinguishing characteristic of today's site-oriented art is the way in which both the art work's relationship to the actuality of a location (as site) and the social conditions of the institutional frame (as site) are subordinate to a discursively determined site that is delineated as a field of knowledge, intellectual exchange, or cultural debate,'

may prove more fruitful.<sup>92</sup> All of the exhibiting artists had established histories of producing site-specific work and had engaged with discursive sites that ranged from climate change to electrical engineering. From this perspective, the museum, as a site that categorizes, could be regarded as another place of friction – one where artists with medium specific training could work through the contradictions of their position. It might further be contended that although they were not comprised of site-specific works, that discursive site – the constitution of the ceramic field – was also the intended and ultimate site of effect for the other exhibitions in this paper.

Adamson proposed that the four artists in *Possibilities and Losses* 'define a moment in ceramic history.'<sup>93</sup> For him, the demise of the ceramics industry and the closure of ceramic-specific courses was leading ceramics to an end of sorts; a scene from which those artists emerged, offering a way forward, which mobilized, but was not constrained by, history. However, the other exhibitions discussed in this paper were, similarly, produced in response to the challenges posed by new forms of administration and practice, from the foundation of the Crafts Council and the

90 Glenn Adamson, 'Outsider Artists', *Possibilities and Losses: Transitions in Clay*, unpag.

91 Hal Foster, *The Return of the Real: The Avant-Garde at the End of the Century*, Cambridge, Mass; London: MIT Press, 1996, 302-309.

92 Miwon Kwon, 'One Place After Another: Notes on Site-Specificity', *October*, 80, 1997, 92.

93 Glenn Adamson, 'Outsider Artists', *Possibilities and Losses: Transitions in Clay*, unpag.

growth of fine artists' work in clay to trained ceramicists' engagement with sculpture and installation. As they demonstrated, whilst temporary exhibitions can expand the scope of medium-specific discourse they can also impose alternative, but equally restrictive, frames. Furthermore, the ceramic field has proven adept at reconfiguring itself in the face of change: whilst ceramics courses in Britain have continued to close, 2009 also saw the launch of The British Ceramics Biennial in Stoke-on-Trent, 2011 brought the major AHRC-funded project *Ceramics in the Expanded Field: Behind the Scenes at the Museum*, which this paper forms part of, and in 2012 Cardiff School of Art held a conference with the explicitly separatist title *Ceramics and Sculpture: Different Disciplines and Shared Concerns*. The discourse around ceramics has also been perpetuated through publications including *Ceramic Review*, *Ceramics: Art and Perception* and the online journals *Interpreting Ceramics* and *C-File*, as well as international exhibitions and ceramics biennials. These initiatives have largely remained distinct from, yet functioned in dialogue with, the expansion of non-hierarchical approaches to craft within art and design practice in the same period.<sup>94</sup> Whilst only time will tell if the Adamson's 'moment' will lead to the explosion or reconstitution of the ceramic field, the examples in this paper illustrated that, as De Waal suggested, there is great potential in an approach to categorization that emphasizes the 'perhaps'.<sup>95</sup>

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94 Glenn Adamson, *The Invention of Craft*, xiv.

95 'It is a moment caught between pathos (the curator struggling to define an object) and insight (how can we list the objects in our lives?). It seems apposite for those of us who are attempting to find languages in which to talk about objects: how do we move from the unknown into the known. And how do we keep the 'perhaps' alive, how do we find a conceptual and linguistic dexterity in our discourse that prevents a slide into absolutes, certainties, over-robust definitions?' Edmund De Waal, 'Statement', *Think Tank*, 2004 [online] <[http://www.thinktank04.eu/image/papers/thinktank2004\\_edmund\\_dewaal\\_small.pdf](http://www.thinktank04.eu/image/papers/thinktank2004_edmund_dewaal_small.pdf)>[accessed 18 June 2013].